

Tibetan Oral History Project Interview H.0202.01

*Taring and Sambo were important aristocratic officials in the Tibetan government. They discussed going for training in the use of machine guns in Gyantse and about the Drongdrag Regiment and Kujar Kunphel's arrest. They also discussed the morning after the 13th Dalai Lama's death and the construction of the Trisam Bridge.*

Q

We have heard that when the 13th Dalai Lama passed away it was the Water-Bird Year, 1933. On the 24th of the 10th month of the Tibetan year, he gave an audience for the monks of the Gyütö [tib. rgyud stod] monastery when they did the religious activity called Jongyu [tib. ljongs rgyug]). However, he couldn't give the audience for the Jongyu of the monks of the Gyumey [tib. rgyud smad] monastery on the next day, the 25th, which was the Ganden Ngamjö holiday because he was not well. That is what I have heard. Is it true?

A

(Mr. Taring) You mean to say that he had appeared on the throne on the 24th, but on the 25th he could not appear.

Q

Yes, that is what I have heard.

A

(Mr. Taring) I do not know exactly because it was not very clear to me.

Q

Where were you at that time?

A

(Mr. Taring) Well at that time, well let us put this way, the year before the 13th Dalai Lama passed away was the Water-Monkey Year, 1932. Probably in the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar I reached Lhasa from Gyantse. In Gyantse, Mr. Yuthok, who is now living in Canada, was at that time the gandrön. I received an order from the Government of Tibet saying that we understand that you are still living at Taring House in Gyantse, so we are

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sending Yuthok with 25 soldiers of the Dalai Lama's Bodyguard Regiment to be trained in the use of machine guns by a British instructor at Gyantse in a place called Janglo [tib. lcang lo] so you should join them there and study with them and act as an interpreter. At that time, there was some trouble in the Kham area of Tibet. From the 12th month of the Water-Monkey Year, we studied how to use the machine guns with the British teacher at Gyantse for 6 months. After six months they completed the work in Gyantse and returned to Lhasa.

Q

Were you a government official when you were asked to work for the government as an interpreter for the students in Janglo?

A

(Mr. Taring) No, I had not yet become a government official. I had just finished my schooling in India and was staying at my Taring estate in Gyantse. At that time I received a telegram from the Government of Tibet stating that we understood that you are staying at your estate so we are sending gandrön Yuthok sey, along with twenty five soldiers to study the use of machine guns in Janglo. You should join with them as an interpreter and also train together with them. So according to this telegram, when Yuthok and the twenty five soldiers arrived, I joined them, studied with them, and worked with them for six months in Janglo.

Q

Was that in 1932?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes. And then after I reached Lhasa, I was commissioned as a Tibetan government official in the Water-Bird Year at the Gyator [tib. brgyad gtor] Festival on the 8th day of the third month of Tibetan calendar. That was the date I became a government official.

[Note: There are several times when commissions were given to become government officials. The 8th day of 3rd month was one such time, and another was at New Years and another was during the Ngamjö period, that is to say, the death anniversary of the Tsongkapa that falls on the 25th of 10th month of the Tibetan calendar. So when Mr. Taring said that I became a government official at Gyator in the Water-Bird Year, it meant

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he was commissioned on the 8th day of 3rd month of the Tibetan calendar in the Water-Bird Year (1933)]

Q

When you say Gyetor, you mean on the 8th day of the 3rd month, right?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes, on that day I was given my commission. Then they also established the Drongdrag [tib. grong drag] Regiment. It was first started in the regiment called Yamön Magar [tib. ya mon dmag sgar]. At that time, they were building the regiment in Trapchi and constructing houses.

Q

Where was the Yamön?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yamön was the place where they used to have a factory where they made the gun called Trigyangjan. It was located at the south side of the gate called Lubug Gyelpo [tib. klu sbug rgyal po]. This was a well known place in Lhasa. The Drongdrag was first established in Yamön while the construction for them was taking place at Trapchi. So when the construction was completed, they shifted to Trapchi.

[Note: The Yamön was used by the Chinese as their Military Headquarters during the early 1900s].

Anyway, training for using the machine guns was in Nortölinga [tib. nor stod gling ga], which was the lower part of Norbulinga.

[Note: Though the word says Nortö, it was the lower part of the Norbulinga. It was just a few furlongs below Drepung Monastery adjoining Norbulinga].

Machine guns were a new weapon at that time in Tibet. So the 13th Dalai Lama took a great interest in that. When we first arrived at Chushul [tib. chu shur], which was quite close to Lhasa, we were received by the chibyog of the Dalai Lama's stable. The first chibyog came to Chushül.

We received the first chibyog at Chushü with the instructions written on the message board (samtra) saying that we should leave Chushü at such and such a time and reach Nyethang [tib. mnyes thang] on such and such a time and spend the night there. Then we received another chibyog at Nyethang saying that we should go the next day to Shing

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Dongkar [tib. shun gdong dkar] which was not very far at all. From Nyethang to Shing Dongkar it was six to seven miles.

Q

At that time, all the soldiers who were trained were with you, right?

A

Yes. We had the machine guns and the parts packed in boxes from India and we had to open all the boxes in Shing Dongkar. In Shing Dongkar we received instructions that we should march up to Lhasa. We stayed one night there and then, according to the instructions; we marched from Shing Dongkar to Lhasa.

Q

Where is Shing Dongkar?

A

(Mr. Taring) It is very near Drepung Monastery. Below it.

Q

Well, we used to call it Dongkar Shoko [tib. gdong dkar sho sgo]. Are you referring to the same place as Shing Dongkar?

A

Oh yes. That was the place where we stayed overnight. Then as I mentioned to you earlier, at Shing Dongkar we repacked all the weapons. We opened all the weapons and put the best saddles on the mules that we had trained and we let them carry the guns, etc. Then we marched from Shing Dongkar and we met again a chibyog with instructions from His Holiness saying that we should wait at Kyetse Lubding [tib. skyed tshal klu lding].

[Note: Now Kyetsal Lubding is two furlongs away from the Drepung Monastery and it is also about two furlong away from Norbulinga.]

As I mentioned earlier, we met the chibyog first at Chushül and then at Nyethang, and then we met the chibyog at Shing Dongkar, and finally we met the chibyog at Kyetse Lubding. I do remember very clearly at that time because we had to march and walk all the way from Shing Dongkar to Norbulinga. Not only the soldiers, but we also had to march and walk. At that time, I had leather breaches which were so tight that my legs were completely numb so I didn't feel how I was walking. [laughter]. We noticed at the time

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when we arrived at the side of Norbulinga, that the 13th Dalai Lama was watching from the Northern Gate of Norbulinga. I noticed that the 13th Dalai Lama came out completely from the Northern gate and was watching us, so we were all very excited and also scared. Without realizing my numbness, I had reached Norbulinga without knowing how I reached there.

Then we marched to the Northern Gate of Norbulinga, but by the time we reached there, the Dalai Lama had already gone inside. However, I noticed a special person wearing a Tibetan dress made from red woolen cloth with the cap known as Wang Lanmo so I had the feeling that he must be Kujar Künphel [tib. sku bcar kun 'phel lags], the favorite of the 13th. He looked very smart and was directing us where to go so I thought he was Künphel. We finally marched through to the new palace (Jensal Phodrang [tib. spyang bsal pho brang]) and we could see from the main gate where the monk officials had gathered to hold the morning trungja tea ceremony. Then we marched through this gate and inside the courtyard through the stone floor of the Jensal Phodrang. Then we had to face all the guns towards the gate not towards the palace. But by the time we were entering the Jensal Phodrang, we noticed that the Dalai Lama was upstairs in his room and he was looking through the window, the big window that we called Rabsal. He was wearing a red raw silk shawl called lemthang. [tib. lem thang] with a cap called josha [tib. jo zhwa]. Then we set down our guns and saluted him.

[Note: Josha is a kind of hat used by senior monks]. The lemthang is a monk's shawl like the sen but when the sen was made out of Bhutanese raw silk, it was called lemthang.]

One thing I forgot to mention before was that he said that before we enter the palace we have to go around the palace. We had to go round the new palace and then enter through the main gate.]

Then after placing the weapons on the ground we had to salute. When we gave the salute, the Dalai Lama came down. We had four machine guns and he looked at each machine gun carefully and then he asked quite a number of questions. He really came down completely too where we were and when he finished his inspection, Künphel told us, "Now you can go." Now you can go and go to the Bodyguard Regiment. So we left there. At that time the depön of the bodyguard regiment was Jangra [tib. lchang ra].

Q

Didn't Jangra become the magji?

A

Yes, later he became the magji, but at that time he was the Gusung Regiment's depön.

Q

In 1933, hadn't Jangra became the magji?

A

(Mr. Taring) It was in 1932. Jangra told us that having to march here was very difficult and you must all be very tired so now relax and remove all your tight military breaches. Just take them off and relax. At that time, I was smoking although it was against the law to smoke [cigarettes] in Norbulinga, so we were smoking bedis. I was used to smoking cigarettes, but the bedi was delicious. Rooms had been allotted where we could put the weapons and then we relaxed. We were given seven days of holiday and after that every day we started doing exercises.

[Note: The reason why I insist on asking that Jangra was the magji yet or not is if you look at the interview with Shatra or rather the interview H.001 he mentioned that Jangra was magji when the 13th Dalai Lama demoted Lungshar. So one of the reasons the 13th Dalai Lama had given his demotion was that he was ignoring the magji Jangra and so that was why I was insisting. However, my question was ignored. Probably they are right. Maybe H.001 was wrong because I further clarified this with Sambo and he remembered when he became the magji so it was certainly not the time of Lungshar.]

As I mentioned earlier, we were given one week's rest and then we started training everyday in Nortölinga which was the area adjoining the Bodyguard Regiment's Headquarters. It was adjacent to the west gate of the Norbulinga. Our exercises included dismantling the machine guns, putting them together and also shooting them.

We were also given twenty mules to be trained. We had already trained the old mules at Gyantse to carry the arms and ammunition and to jump over canals and also over ruined walls. So these were exercise we did with the first twenty mules that had come from the Dalai Lama's stable. In the beginning, those mules were very tough and were like wild animals. They were not like the normal mules that we used to put loads on because they were kept in Norbulinga without any training. So they refused to carry the loads, especially when we put on the ammunition which made noise and caused them to get excited and jump around. It was very difficult. So we had no way to control them except to put sand in the bags and have four soldiers hold each mule and gradually put the sand on them and ride them and run them around and make them sweat a lot.

Gradually, we were able to train them. Then afterwards, when we were putting ammunition boxes on them, they started walking which made a lot of noise so they got excited and it was very difficult even for four people to control them. So anyway, we got

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special saddles with straps that went under the tail and on the chest that we had ordered from India made from excellent leather. With these [saddles], no matter how much they jumped around they could not throw their loads off. So after some time they could not do anything. When they could not throw the loads off after so many jumps, they ultimately laid down and made lot of noise from their mouths. The Dalai Lama used to visit the site where we were doing the exercises and he took a keen interest in how we dismantled and put together the machine guns and shot them. He was very happy about the whole performance.

Then he decided to form the Drongdrag regiment and started it at Yamön. At this time, it was the beginning of the recruitment of members of the Drongdrag Regiment from the better-off families. The Dalai Lama had issued an order saying that every good family should send one soldier so that is why it was called Drongdak, "better household" regiment. So the sons of the well-to-do families were recruited and when they were taken to cut their long hair short [military style], they felt so bad that it was almost like taking them to hell, especially those who had come from the nomad areas. The boys from the northern nomad areas thought this was very bad and I remember seeing them after they had cut their hair holding their braids crying.[laughter] Anyway it was the first regiment in Tibet where the soldiers cut their hair short in the western style. This Drongdrag regiment was known as the Khadang Drongdrag Magar. Kha dangpo means the 1st Kha. It was also known as the "favorite magar" [tib. spyan bsel dmag sgar]. It was really a favorite regiment because all their uniforms were specially ordered from Kolcutta's Nanking Store. The uniforms of the officers were ordered from Kolcutta's Nanking Store. The Dalai Lama took a keen interest in this regiment.

Q

When you said the Dalai Lama visited when you were training, did the Dalai Lama talk to the people personally?

Q

[Note: In Tibet it was very difficult for ordinary people to see the Dalai Lama talking, so what the Dalai Lama said was always interpreted by other people. The rules normally did not permit him to talk to someone or another person to talk to him.]

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes, he did. He would ask all the important questions.

Q

There wasn't any fear or anything like that, right?

A

Yes. He was accompanied by his favorite persons who were normally Jensal Kunphel, Namdrol [tib. rnam sgrol] and then Tashi Dhondup [tib. bkra shis don grub]. All three accompanied him most of the time and there was also Dechen Yingsal [tib. bde chen dbyings gsal]. So these were his favorite persons and they always came together when His Holiness went for a walk. They would also go inside Norbulinga where they were doing these exercises. Anyway, that was the beginning of the Drongdrag Regiment. They started it at Yamön and then finally moved it to Trapchi. The regiment of Drongdrag Regiment Headquarters in Trapchi were built on the west side of the Trapchi Office.

Q

Then did you continue to work in the Drongdrag Regiment?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes. When they established this Drongdag Regiment, I joined the government officials corps with the rank of Senampa. Yuthok and I were appointed as the depön of Drongdag because the Drongdag regiment had one thousand soldiers and each five hundred troops needed one depön. Yuthok of course, was the senior Drongdrag Depön and I was appointed [as junior]. At that time, the military badges we put on the hats and as well as the shoulder insignias were made from pure gold in the Trapchi Mint Office itself.

Q

What kind of insignias did the Drongdrag Regiment have?

A

(Mr. Taring) We used the crossed or double vajra [tib. rdo rje rgya gram] whatever it may be called, one vajra goes straight and another at an angle. This was for the depön.

Q



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How many crossed vajras did you have? For example, in India as you know, stars have been used by army officers, lieutenants have two, captains have three and majors have lions and not stars and it goes like that.

A

(Mr. Taring) We had two insignias.

(Mr. Sambo) There was no system like the Indian system where the ranks were denoted by insignias either on the hat or the shoulder. However, the depön used pure gold and others used ordinary silver or gilded metal, and then the ordinary soldiers like the platoon leaders used gilded copper, etc.

Q

So there was no difference in the number of crossed vajras, but was there any difference between the head insignias (mogor [ch. mao hui])?

A

There were no differences.

Q

The depön used a slightly larger head insignia, right?

A

Yes.

Q

When the Dalai Lama died, were you still the depön of the Trapchi Regiment? And did you hear that he was not well? Did you hear he was sick?

A

(Mr. Taring) No. We never heard that he was sick. So that is why they had trouble later. The monasteries in particular said that we never heard that the Dalai Lama was sick and now we have heard that he died suddenly.

Q

Where and how did you hear that the 13th Dalai Lama died?

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A

(Mr. Taring) Well, at that time, I was living at the Tsarong house inside the courtyard as one of their tenants (tib. moyan [mo yan]). So I heard about it when I was staying there.

Q

How did you hear that? Did somebody shout or come and tell you? Or how did you hear that?

A

(Mr. Taring) They came early in the morning, before 3 a.m. or around three o'clock and knocked on all the doors and shouted saying take down all the prayer flags and no one can put on ornaments.

Q

Did the korchagpa do this?

A

(Mr. Taring) Probably, the korchagpa or the house managers [tib. khang gnyer] delivered the message. Then they said the 13th Dalai Lama died. It was announced.

Q

It might be the khangyö khangchung [tib. khang yod khang chung] who delivered the message.

A

(Mr. Sambo) Maybe it was the khangnyer who gave the information.

(Mr. Taring) the message was brought by both the khangnyer and korchakpa.

Q

What did you do the next day? Did you go to the office or what did you have to do?

A

(Mr. Taring) We had no office. All officials had to go to Norbulinga the next day. At that time, all the shape had to wear the chuba called Tsöman [tib. tshos man]. Tsöman was a yellow or slightly dark yellow satin which did not have the round dragon design like the

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dzögö [tib. mdzod gos] which was normally worn by the officials above the forth rank. All the Senampa had to wear dark purple serge [tib. 'go snam] chuba whereas they normally wore maroon colored satin gowns. The fifth rank officials wore woolen cloth chubas. They even had to remove the button or crest on their caps. They also removed their long earring called sogji [tib. sog jil] and the smaller turquoise earring they wore. When I saw this it was very painful and I really felt bad as if my heart was turning upside down.

Q

All the crests were removed from their hats, right?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes.

Q

You mean to say the crest of the normal hat, what was called jangda [tib. lcags mda'] was removed?

A

(Mr. Taring) No, because at that time it was winter, so they were wearing black fox caps (tib. wagir [wa gir]) which didn't have a crest.

Q

What about the monks?

A

(Mr. Taring) The monks had to take off their satin vests [tib. gos chen stod 'gag] and the inner vest which was made of silk [tib. rngul len]. And after two or three days, I do not remember exactly, they had a public audience of the corpse and that public audience [tib. pur mjal] took place at the Jensal Phodrang (Palace).

Q

The moment you heard about the death of the Dalai Lama, did you have to rush to Norbulinga, right away?

A

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(Mr. Taring) We stayed in Lhasa as usual like other ordinary citizens of the city and did whatever you had to do like going to the temple and praying, etc. in Lhasa. Then we received a notice from the government asking us to be present in Norbulinga. In accordance with the order by the government, we had to go to Norbulinga. Of course, the 13th Dalai Lama passed away in the Jensal Phodrang, in the room named Chime Chogkyi [tib. 'chi med mchog skyid]. From there the body was transferred to the Kelsang Phodrang Palace within Norbulinga. And at that time, they used the normal drum beating as when the Dalai Lama was traveling officially. So when we heard the sound of the dama [tib. brda ma] drum beating, we felt sadder. We really felt sad at that time. There was no one who was not crying. Finally, the body was placed on the throne in the Kelsang Phodrang and the public audience was given.

Q

When they gave the public audience, did they cover his face?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes, his face was covered with a red or yellow silk. I do not remember exactly. His face was definitely covered. However, they put on all the dresses including his satin cloak and gave a public audience. When the public audience was finished, the body was again removed to the private room on the top of the Jensal Phodrang where they had big rituals.

Q

At that time, as far as the administration of the government was concerned, it was the responsible of the Prime Minister who happened to be Langdün at that time. Langdün was young, so people started talking about the need for a helper or assistant or somebody who will assist the Prime Minister. The talk was started and of course backed by the Kashag and then they held the intermediate Tsondu [tib. hrag bdus rgyas pa] meeting and in that meeting people started saying that there was a need to have two representatives to help Langdün--one had to be a monk official and one a lay official. Some others suggested that we should have a lama to whom we can bow down and seek blessings. And some said that we know clearly who the Dalai Lama used to trust [implying Kunphel]. And all this sort of different talk took place. How did this thing start? How did this development take place?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes, these things took place in the tshondu meeting.

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Q

Were you there in the Tsondu?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes, the tshondu meetings were taking place in the Jensal Phodrang's work office [tib. las shag].

Q

At that time was the body was still there?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes the body was still there.

Q

Would you clarify a little about the Tsondu which you said took place at the work office. Where was this located?

A

(Mr. Taring) It was located at the east side of the northern gate of the Jensal Phodrang. That was where the Tsondu took place. The Tsondu was divided into groups, and the various groups had different opinions. Probably some even suggested that Kujar should become the assistant to the Prime Minister. So the other people who never liked Kujar wouldn't like that and this was the beginning of the trouble. There was a fifth rank official (tib. letsenpa [las tshan pa]) who might have talked a little bit.

(Mr. Sambo) The fifth rank Letsenpa was named Lobsang Norbu [tib. blo bzang nor bu]. He was very talkative and people did not pay much attention to what he said. However, he said some things at the meeting. On the next day, in the evening, a messenger came to call people for the meeting on the next day. When he started knocking on this official's door, he thought that they were going to arrest him and he told his family members, "I spoke a few words in the meeting and probably people have come to arrest me." He was so scared that he jumped from one story high and broke his leg. Actually, the person who was knocking was not there to arrest him but was a messenger coming to tell him to attend the meeting tomorrow. But he was doubtful and he jumped from one story and broke his leg. This shows how scared people were at that time.

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(Mr. Taring) This person was called Lobsang Norbu and there was a saying, "He is neither monk nor layman and just dressed like a dharma practitioner who says "Yes" to whatever people say." [tib. skya man srid man chos pa'i gzugs/ zhal nas sbad gsungs blo nor zhabs]. He was wearing a Mongolian style dress as his uniform because he was converted from the ranks of monk officials to a kind of lay official. So he was wearing the Mongolian dress and speaking in the Tsang dialect, saying "bai" [tib. sbad] [which means yes (red)]. Therefore people used to make fun of him. In this particular meeting, so many comments had been made that they said, "Regarding the root reason why the 13th Dalai Lama died all of a sudden, we would like to ask questions to Künphel." So that was the beginning of the trouble at the meeting. Not only that, at the time when the Tsondu was moved to the Kelsang Phodrang, I was one of the members. This meeting took place in the veranda near the gag where there was a tree. The people in the Tsondu called Kujar and also (Jensal) Tashi Thondup. They called both of them to the meeting and at the beginning both of them came to the meeting. At first they just came without noticing much and they sort of came in a normal way. Then when the officials interrogated them, Kujar had to kneel down.

Q

When they came to the meeting initially, they didn't tell them to sit down, right?

A

(Mr. Taring) They did not ask them to sit down or anything. They made them stand. Both of them stood up and were asked to explain how his Holiness died and how was this medicine given and who had given it and then the talk of the Nechung oracle and how they called him and according to the prophecy of the state oracle, the medicine called [tib. cham 'joms dpa' bo bco brgyad] was given. It was the name of the medicine. This medicine was given to the Dalai Lama. Then gradually some people said this is fantastic. You were involved in a very dangerous action.

Q

Did they hold the meeting for a couple of days?

A

(Mr. Taring) It was held for 2-3 days.

Q

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Usually, would Kujar sit at the head or where would he sit?

A

(Mr. Taring) Usually he would sit near the Talama. At that time, there was also the Yigtsang Nyerpa who later became the depön of the Bodyguard Regiment of the Dalai Lama. He was called Somphü [tib. gzom phud] Depön.

(Mr. Sambo) Künphel enjoyed the rank of Talama. So he probably was able to sit as a Talama. Talama had the highest rank in the Tsondu, so he should be able to sit somewhere.

[Note: Yigtsang Nyerpa is the secretary of the Yigtsang]

(Mr. Taring) The Yigtsang Nyerpa commented on Kujar Künphel. By that time, Künphel had already knelt down in the meeting place and Somphü said, "The 5th Dalai Lama said, 'Whenever there is a necessity of killing and beating, then one should not have a small heart' " [tib. gsod rdung nges par dgos la snying ma chung]. So there was such a verse taught by the 5th Dalai Lama. He quoted those words and then he said a lot of things about Kujar. It was not only Somphü at that time, but Jamön Depa [tib. bya smon sde pa] of Sera Je College and the monk nick-named, "Big Horse" (tib. tigija [ti gi cag]) of Sera Me. All these people became very rough toward Kujar.

Q

Normally in this kind of Tsondu, don't the ex-abbots and abbots of Drepung Monastery and the present abbots of Sera and the representatives of Ganden abbot attend? So how come this time a few extra monks like Jamön Depa and Tigija were able to attend the meeting? In what capacity did they attend?

A

(Mr. Taring) I don't know in what capacity they attended but they were definitely there. At that time I was only a new government official and I had been in office for only seven months, so I really did not know how it all happened. I was already lost since I had have been studying in India and I had no idea about Tibetan Government policy and politics and so I was completely lost and I had no idea how they came to be there. But they were there definitely.

Q

An important event that occurred at this time was the disintegration of the Drongdrag Regiment, right?

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A

(Mr. Taring) The Drongdrag Regiment was not dismantled right away, but it gradually disintegrated because they blamed Künphel for the treatment given to the Dalai Lama and as mentioned earlier, they even said a poem quoting the 5th Dalai Lama. So they quoted this and arrested the Künphel. The arrest of Künphel was done at the meeting itself. At that time, they had twenty members of the bodyguard regiment kept ready at the meeting and Künphel was arrested. He was taken to Sharchenjog [prison] in the east wing of the Potala. When Kujar was taken away, instead of walking towards the main gate, Künphel walked directly towards the window of the 13th Dalai Lama's room where he normally watched opera shows, etc... Then he walked onto the stage where the opera show was performed for him and then made three prostrations towards the temple of the protector deity Mahakala, (tib. Gönpö [mgon po]) and then walked directly towards the prison at the Potala. At that time he was wearing a chuba made from the best quality woolen cloth (tib. shema [shad ma]) and he walked very fast, so very fast that the bodyguard troops could not catch him and they had to almost run as they went towards the Potala prison.

Q

Would you further clarify about the order for the arrest of Kujar. Was it really given directly by the Tsondu itself at that time?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes.

Q

If that is so, then I need further clarification because before the judgment was passed on Kujar Künphel and the others, Reting had already taken over the regency on the 10th of 1st month the Dog Year. This was 2 months after the death of the Dalai Lama. At that time, the Tsondu hadn't made the decision about Kujar. So how come the Tsondu gave an order directly to him? How did that happen? The Dalai Lama had died on the 30th of the 10th month of the Tibetan Calendar and Reting had taken over on the 10th of the 1st month of the Dog Year, which was only two months and few odd days later. During that period they had not decided on the punishment of Kujar. The Tsondu meeting was held for two purposes: getting information on the death of the Dalai Lama and choosing the Regent or whoever will succeed the Dalai Lama. So before making the decision on the first issue, i.e., Kujar and the Neychung medium, etc. the decision was made on the second



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subject, that is, the appointment of the successor. So Reting had already taken over. So how come the Kujar order was given directly from the meeting. Another thing concerns the dismantling of the Drongdrag Regiment. Was it done before the arrest of Kujar or was it done after his arrest?

A

(Mr. Taring) I think that the dismantling of the Drongdrag Regiment occurred before the arrest of Kujar. One day Kujar had come to the Kashag regarding the affairs of the Drongdrag Regiment and we, the depön, got the order from the Kashag that Kujar was there. This was on a Saturday, which normally was a holiday in Tibet, like Sunday is a holiday in the West. Saturday was a holiday instead of Sunday because Saturday was a bad day (tib. shesa [gshed gza']) for the Dalai Lama [astrologically].

[Note: The days of the week were divided into three categories. One was called lasa [tib. bla gza']. This was a good day for a person. Another one was called sogsa [tib. srog gza']. It was the life day. The third was the bad day. So Saturday happened to be the bad day for the 13th Dalai Lama so it was the day when the government in Tibet did not do work. ]

Anyway, on Saturdays, soldiers of the Drongdrag Regiment normally went off to the city for their weekly day off. The regiment had two depön, the senior one was Yuthok who is now the Yuthok Sawangchemmo who is living in Canada, and the junior one was me. Mr. Yuthok left for home one day earlier, but I stayed in the Regimental Headquarters in Trapchi. So the next day, when the soldiers went off to Lhasa for their weekly day off, instead of going to Lhasa they stayed in Trapchi and had a meeting in one of the open fields near the Möndrong Sampa [tib. smon grong zam pa] bridge. Möndrong was the name of a family whose family house was just in front a bridge that came to be called Möndrong Bridge.

So they were having a meeting instead of going to town. One of my staff members who I had hired from Kalimpong whose name was Gyapön Chöndze, walked into my room and said, "Look, the soldiers are having a meeting near the bridge instead of going off to town. Why don't you look through your binoculars? And [he said] it would be better if you carried a mauser pistol and locked them up." I looked through the binoculars and I also sent someone to observe them. I saw that the soldiers had not gone to town and instead were having a meeting there. Then I saw that the soldiers in the regiment's headquarters who had gone down there had carried quite heavy loads on their backs. I thought that they didn't need to carry such loads just for their day off, so I was wondering why they were doing that. Then the soldiers who remained in regimental headquarters and had not yet gone for their day off, also started going down with loads on their heads. So I asked

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them what were these loads they were carrying were. I stopped them, and when I opened their luggage, or rather the sacks on their backs, I found they were carrying their cooking utensils, etc. I told them, "You are going for one day off, so why are you taking all these cooking utensils, clothing and bedding? Why you are doing this?" So the soldiers took out the things and put them back. I told them not to leave the premises. I locked them in.

At about that time, the meeting at the bridge was over and they started leaving so when I noticed that, I thought that there was no reason for that so we have to go down and bring them back. But because only a few officers were left and the majority were down there, I thought it may cause unnecessary trouble for us so I thought that it would be better to inform Yuthok about what happened. That is what I decided, so we went to Yuthok House to inform him about it. Then Yuthok and I left for Norbulinga immediately to inform the Kashag what was happening. By that time, all of our soldiers were coming through various streets like behind the Horkhang House or via Jangsebshar or the Möndrong Bridge and also some of them were going through the city market, etc. Finally, when we reached the gate of Norbulinga, the soldiers had already collected there and were staying near the gate and not moving. Although I was the depön and they were the soldiers, this had become something else. Then we called the gate keepers so the two of us, the depön, could get inside the gate of Norbulinga. However, the moment they opened the lock from inside, the soldiers pushed the door and all of the soldiers went in ignoring their commanders standing there. So when the two of us went to the Kashag, they were already there at the gate of the Kashag. Then when we got to the Kashag, the soldiers had already submitted a petition that they had prepared for the Kashag. At that time, the leaders of the movement were people like Sangme Lugodng [tib. srang smad lu gu gdong]. Most of their leaders were from the Shigatse area. Those Shigatse area people led the movement and many of the soldiers really did not know what was happening and just were there.

[Note: The reason why the Shigatse soldiers were leading this is that Lungshar had quite good influence over Shigatse families since he himself was from the Tsang area. So they led this. The propaganda that went around in the Drongdrag Regiment was that since the Dalai Lama had died, this is the opportunity for us to go home and if you miss this, you will have to remain as a soldier for the rest of your life. So that was the propaganda they used.]

I was given orders from the Kashag. Kujar was there earlier and on top of that, Senangse from Yabshi Langdün [tib. sras nang sras] who was the Paymaster official (tib. phogpön [phogs dpon]) was there.

Q

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Which Senangse?

A

(Mr. Taring) He was the father of the young Senangse who was the phogpön then. Because he became phogpön, he was the Laja for 7-8 years. I also worked as a Laja for 18 years. So Senangse and Trekhang Trungyichemmo, Künkhyen [tib. kun mkhyen], were the two staff people working under kujar in Trapchi. So both of them were also called to the Kashag. Yuthok and I were ordered to hand over the machine guns to the two of them who were ordered not to let the soldiers go back to Trapchi.

Q

Was this the Kashag's order?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes. We were told they will send the bodyguard soldiers to protect the Trapchi Regiment. They sent 250 bodyguard soldiers who set up machine guns on the roof of the west gate and south gate of the regiment in order to stop the soldiers entering. So this was the order given to the two of them and they had to go back. At the same time, the soldiers who were standing outside also came to know that such an order had been issued and so they were afraid to go back to their regiment because they said that if one goes back, they will shoot at them with the machine guns. So they got scared and they stayed away. At that time, the 250 bodyguards soldiers were also sent to Trapchi sort of to replace or rather to stop the old soldiers from entering.

Q

What I heard was that when the Dalai Lama died they wanted to choose a person to take over the administration in Tibet. Some thought that kujar would do this and he had his own backer. Lungshar had his own interests regarding this and similarly the Kashag had its own interests. Therefore, initially, until they were able to push Künphel aside, then the question of any others did not arise. Lungshar was making one group and of course Trimön was the most powerful man in the Kashag and both of them didn't want Künphel to assist Langdün. However, regarding demoting Kujar, putting Kujar to one side, both had to collaborate with each other and it became necessary to dismantle the Drongdrag Regiment before they did anything to Kujar. In order to do this, Lungshar played a strong role by creating the rumor among the soldiers that you if you leave today you may be able to return to your homes and if you don't you will miss the opportunity for the rest of your

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life and have to remain as a soldier. This was the major influence on the situation that Lungshar did. Then when they left the regiment, the Kashag gave the order to not let them return. Is that true?

A

(Mr. Taring) That is true. It was like the proverb, "The deity was possessed by a devil." [tib. lha khog 'dre zhugs]. The soldiers were not to be blamed and they were like the proverb, "The cow lead by a thief." [tib. rkun mas khrid pa'i ba] However, the leaders like the gyapön were not involved, only the platoon leaders and the squad leaders from the Tsang area were saying such things and influenced most of the soldiers. But most of the soldiers did not know what was happening and what they were doing. And finally they found that they were unable to return to their regiment. The influence for this definitely came from Lungshar, like the wind blew the paper [tib. shog sbug rlung 'tshang] and the order not to allow their return was given to me personally by the Kashag, actually by Trimon.

[Note: This was confirmed both by Mr. Taring and Sambo.]

Q

Now suppose that if Kujar had been arrested before the dismantling of the Drongdrag regiment, would the Drongdrag have stood behind Kujar and revolted?

A

(Mr. Taring) No, they wouldn't have. However they were taking precautions and that is why they did that. But as far as the soldiers of the Drongdrag Regiment were concerned, they were not very happy with Kujar because they were all unwilling recruits.

Q

So they would be happy if they got the chance to leave, right?

A

(Mr. Taring) Yes. If a household had three sons, one of their sons definitely had to become a soldier and even if some of them had two sons, one had to go. They were better households economically and quite well-to-do so naturally they did not want a son to go away from home and stay in Lhasa. However, they were forced to remain there so most of them were unhappy and unwilling to be soldiers. So the moment they got the opportunity they wanted to run away. So they were not very happy with Kujar, although Kujar did a lot

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for them. As far as the regiment was concerned, this was one of the best regiments ever. It was even better than the Dalai Lama's personal Bodyguard Regiment. For example, they had very good uniforms and weapons and exercises and were paid better and got better food. Since those soldiers left, they could not go back and there was no way for them to go back to [Trapchi].

Q

Did some of them really want to go back [to Trapchi]?

A

(Mr. Taring) Certainly some of them wanted to go back to get their possessions. And some would have liked to remain also in the military. However they had left without knowing what was happening and once they were out, there was the government order saying that they were not allowed to return. So they had no place to go back to and they had to remain there and then finally they set up a camp on the area that was called the "new military camp" (tib. magari sarpa [dmag sgar gsar pa]).

The Magar Sarpa was located beside the Tsidrung Linga [tib. rtse drung gling ga] in the south and southwest part of the Lhasa near the river. The government did not take any decision about them and they could not go anywhere and had no food to eat so they started going around begging for food. This went on for maybe seven, eight or ten days or so and they suffered a lot. Finally, the government decided to keep only 250 of them and the rest of them were asked to go back to their respective home areas. So that was the government's decision.

About that time, Yuthok asked to be transferred from the Drongrag Regiment to the Bodyguard Regiment and he transferred. Then I was left alone. I remained, but there was nothing to do with only 250 troops so there was no work and not much drilling because there were so few people. Out of 1,000 troops, we now had only 250 left. So we really could not do much and finally I had nothing to do so I asked the soldiers to dig a well because the shortage of water was a big problem in this area. We did not have water and had to go to get it all the way from Trapchi Monastery. So I asked them to dig a few wells. Normally you have to carefully check and finally find appropriate ground and then do calculations and dig. However, I didn't do this but somehow I dug a few wells and finally water came out and was quite useful. So this was the last work of the Drongrag Regiment. After this they asked the remaining 250 soldiers to return to their respective homes and the Drongrag Regiment was completely shut down. The new barracks that we built was given to the old Trapchi Regiment and they moved in.

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Q

This is fine. How did they close it and what about the officers involved? How did they manage them?

A

(Mr. Taring) As for the officers, as for me, I was left without work and I asked to be transferred to the Trapchi Office.

[Note: The Trapchi Office (Lekhung) was an office run by the late famous Tsarong Shape and two others. This office was a kind of small factory that produced Tibetan paper currency and coins. At one point they even produced guns and some things like that, but that did not work well.]

Tsarong, Dündül Namgyal [tib. bdud 'dul rnam rgyal] the famous Tsarong's son, worked with me under Tsarong [Dzasa]. We built the new Trisam [tib. khri zam] bridge that was about six miles away from Drepung Monastery over the Tölung River. I worked with the Dronyerchemmo Ngawang, who was the last dronyerchemmo to the 13th Dalai Lama. After the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, he also did not have much work so we became deputies to Tsarong for building the bridge. So I took the major responsibility of carrying out the correspondence in English with various suppliers in Kolcutta and also for taking measurements of requirements of parts for the bridge. The Tibetan correspondence and issuing orders, etc. were carried out by the dronyerchemmo.

Q

Was it during the period of Reting regency that you built the Trisam Bridge?

A

(Mr. Taring) It was the Reting period. I remember that we invited the Prime Minister Langdün for the inauguration of the bridge, and he cut the ribbon. We also stopped travelers and transport animals loaded with wood and so on for a few hours and made them wait on each side and then let them go. Before that there used to be three bridges built from wood and stones that were washed away by the water when lots of water came from the Tölung area. The bridge was a link between Lhasa and the surrounding villages as the villagers came to Lhasa through this bridge from the west side. So every year they had to rebuild the bridge which was always temporary. It caused great suffering for the people living near this area and the villagers used to say that the bridge was making us suffer and because of this we will never be able to raise up our heads. So

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Tsarong decided to build a proper iron bridge over this river. The Kashag agreed to this so he was able to build it. I remember that the late Tsarong decided to have equal participation and contribution amongst the people. Some of them big estates owned by the different monasteries such as Gyari Tsal that was owned by Loseling and Nechung owned some lands and then some noble families and all of them had great excuses showing government documents stating that they were exempt from giving any taxes or contributions or labor for building the bridge or any other activities. They had these great documents written on yellow brocade with paintings of the two red and black protectors on them (what we call in Tibetan sungma marnak nyi. [tib. srung ma dmar nag gnyis]). The red stood for Jamsing [tib. lcam sring] and the black stood for Lhamo (Shridevi). These were actually the protector deities of the Tibetan government. That is why they were called red and black protectors. So all these were there. However, Tsarong made a special order saying that all exemptions were not acceptable here. Therefore everybody contributed equally.

So with this we were able to build the bridge which had three portions. The central portion was 108 feet and the two side portions were 68 feet each. We built one portion every year because it was necessary to bring the materials all the way from India. Because these had to be carried by villagers, it became a great problem for them so there was no way to get these materials from India in one year. So we decided to build one span one year and then leave the next year free and then the next year build one portion. By doing this, it was less of a burden for the villagers but it meant it took us six years to complete. We had to shift every single item of the bridge including the cement and the nails from India, transported by the villagers. Some of these were carried on their backs and some on animals. So it was a great burden on the people and so we decided to build each portion of the bridge in alternate years. So this was how we did it in six years.

Q

At this time, in the main Tsondu there was talk that since Langdün is so young he needed assistants to carry out the activities of the state. How did they do that? At that time, Chapa Rusur [tib. cha pa ru zur] and the son of Lhalu spoke saying we should choose two people, one from the lay side and one from the monk side, to be the assistants to the Prime Minister to set up a council of thee which would manage affairs. A few other people like Kapshöba said that we know very well whom the 13th Dalai Lama used to trust and there is no need for repetitions of this and that. So how did that happen and when did that happen?

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[Note: Mr. Taring acknowledged this and Mr. Sambo said nothing]